

REMARKS

Upon entry of the present amendment, claims 7, 9, 21-36, 39 and 41 will remain pending in the application. Claims 39 and 41 will be amended, and claims 37, 38 and 40 will be cancelled. Claims 1-6, 8 and 10-20 were cancelled by a previous amendment. Entry of the present amendment, reconsideration of the rejection and allowance of the pending application in view of the following remarks are respectfully requested.

As an initial matter, Applicants wish to thank the Examiner for allowing claims 7, 9 and 21-36, and for indicating that claims 39 and 41 include allowable subject matter.

In the Office Action, the Examiner rejected claim 37 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Nomura et al. in view of Estabrooks (U.S. Patent No. 5,768,675); rejected claim 38 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Nomura et al. in view of Estabrooks, and further in view of Driessen-Olde Scheper et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,683,639); and rejected claim 40 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Nomura et al. in view of Estabrooks, and further in view of Hada (U.S. Patent No. 6,218,660).

As an initial matter, Applicants wish to correctly identify Nomura et al. for the record. In the Office Action, the Examiner erroneously referred to Nomura et al. as being U.S. Patent No. 6,949,849. However, Applicants submit that the inventors of U.S. Patent No. 6,949,849 are Wright et al. In a telephone interview with the Examiner on April 19, 2006, the Examiner informed Applicants' U.S. representative that the correct number of the Nomura et al. patent is 6,989,849.

Upon entry of the present amendment, claims 37, 38 and 40 will be cancelled,

merely to advance prosecution of the present application to issue. Thus, cancellation of these claims should not be viewed as an acquiescence by Applicants to the propriety of the rejection.

In the Office Action, the Examiner objected to claims 39 and 41 as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but indicated that they would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim. Applicants have amended claims 39 and 41 to be in independent form, including all of the features of base claim 37 (now cancelled). Thus, Applicants respectfully request that the Examiner withdraw the objection to claims 39 and 41, and allow these claims.

Based on the above, it is respectfully submitted that this application is now in condition for allowance, and a Notice of Allowance is respectfully requested.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Applicants recognize that the current status of the present application is after-Final. However, Applicants respectfully submit that entry of the present amendment is proper under the current circumstances, as it is submitted that the present amendment merely cancels rejected claims and places objected claims into independent form, and thus does not raise new issues requiring further search and/or consideration.

Applicants further submit that the present amendment places the current application in condition for allowance.

Entry and consideration of the present amendment, reconsideration of the outstanding Office Action, and allowance of the present application and all of the claims therein are respectfully requested and now believed to be appropriate. Applicants have made a sincere effort to place the present invention in condition for allowance and

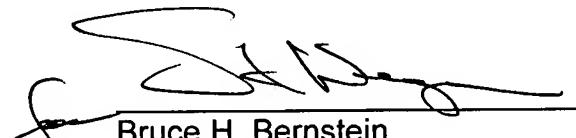
believe that they have now done so.

Any amendments to the claims which have been made in this amendment, and which have not been specifically noted to overcome a rejection based upon the prior art, should be considered to have been made for a purpose unrelated to patentability, and no estoppel should be deemed to attach thereto.

Should an extension of time be necessary to maintain the pendency of this application, including any extensions of time required to place the application in condition for allowance by an Examiner's Amendment, the Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fee to Deposit Account No. 19-0089.

Should the Examiner have any questions or comments regarding this response, or the present application, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned at the below-listed telephone number.

Respectfully submitted,
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